
ἄρχαί

AS ORIGENS DO PENSAMENTO OCIDENTAL
THE ORIGINS OF WESTERN THOUGHT

RESENHA | REVIEW

Review of Calenda, G. *Un Universo Aperto. La cosmologia di Parmenide e la struttura della Terra* (2017)

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PRIVITELLO, L. A. (2020). Review of Calenda, G. *Un Universo Aperto. La cosmologia di Parmenide e la struttura della Terra* (2017). *Archai* 29, e02910.

Guido Calenda fearlessly places the reader within a few ongoing battles in Parmenidean scholarship. In these fierce skirmishes, there are no clear heroes, and casualties are not properly accounted for.

https://doi.org/10.14195/1984-249X_29_10

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From a rough start, questionable chapter sequence, and his display of courage in pursuing doxographical dangers (viz., Aëtius), Calenda brings out tools of scholarship in places where the battle is either all but over, surrounded by an interminable fog, or yet to begin. Through a soft and hard credit inquiry assessed from his admirable use of the economy of textual support, long established scholarship and determined fragment-citation sequences continue to control the field. The thickets of Parmenidean studies have become a force all their own, alluring, entangled, and difficult to adopt in both range and detail. Calenda is to be given credit.

Calenda's goal is to show that if we abandon the presupposition that fragment 12 (and Aëtius's gloss) refers to celestial phenomena, and instead read it as a description of the earth, then incoherencies disappear, and we are shown an important doctrine of the Elea based on solid empirical elements (p. 15). This is quite a claim. What these incoherencies exactly are or whether they reside in Parmenides' actual fragment-citations, in the sequence order of the fragments, or in the paraphrases of commentators, is not clear. What is clear is that Calenda was inspired by Livio Rossetti's "Parmenides' Polumathia: an inventory of his doxai" (Rossetti, 2015), as well as Rossetti's forthcoming work, *Parmenide 'astronomo' e 'biologo'*, along with a small renaissance in the study of Parmenides' physics and astronomy (so-called 'opinion of mortals'), from the International Symposium dedicated to Parmenides in Buenos Aires in 2007. With *Un Universo Aperto*, Calenda is also revisiting, recalibrating, and clarifying his previous works to better argue that Parmenides' cosmological-scientific *doxai* share some affinity with his *alētheia*. Here, too, is an example of how grappling with Parmenides' poem, milieu, and centuries of brilliant and, at points, questionable doxography, testimonia, and scholarship, temporarily blinds one to a path through the enchanted tangles.

As a main problem in Parmenidean scholarship, Calenda is wrestling against a determined fragment-citation sequence that he does not question, and accepts the very strained and rather questionable division of the poem into two parts. For Calenda, an

ontological/epistemological section clearly precedes the exposition of scientific doctrines from fragments 8.53-61 and 9 (p. 9, 20). I find this lack of questioning the very fragment sequence structure of the poem (while seeking to reveal the meaning of one fragment), as improperly joining skeletal remains that betrays and distorts a once vibrant living body. Calenda mentions the perils in the little that has remained of the original text, joined fragments, and interpretations (p. 13), even calling upon Luigi Ruggiu to warn us that these citations (from Plato and Aristotle onwards) have not always followed philological care, but rather their own designs, intentions and contexts. Yet, Calenda (and how many more) remains ensnared in these dusty regions. First is in having remained deaf to the way that the oral tradition, from which the poem clearly emerged, and served, lends us a way to reconstruct the fragments that would free them from what Calenda sees as heavily compressed, and of arbitrary distinction due to the use and abuse of language (p. 14 & n. 12; p. 24).

Any resequencing or reconstruction of the poem must seriously take into account Parmenides' position as legislator, and healer. Parmenides is the initiate of the lessons of the goddess, and the poem's structure is a retelling of the lessons prohibiting our use of illusory and pervasive distinctions in naming. Parmenides directed his poem for the Elean community. The citizens heard his lessons, honored his laws, and had their magistrates swear to these years after his death. To regain this veritable opening, and measured restraint, one must first extend and apply the greatest care to the compositional and fragment sequence order of the poem. These lessons are clear in fragments 8.38-41, and 6.4-9 as Calenda well recognizes. Therein one finds the greatest mishaps in distinctions, and the all too human application of names/labels. While Calenda hints at this problem in the Introduction, and in chapter 1, he lets it slide as fallout of the "strongly compressed character of the original text" coupled with damaging effects upon its transcriptions with "the passing of time" (p. 14, 19).

It is intimated, but not stated, that Calenda follows the fragment ordering of Diels and Kranz, from *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*,

but also distances himself from how Diels, and more contemporary scholars, have identified, and merged the δαίμων in fragment 12.3 with Necessity, Law, Justice, Fate. While this is a positive sign, this study needed to show the reader how the poem moves through various fields, and how the specific field where fragment 12 belonged was perhaps a transition from the cosmological to the geological/biological, or the mythological. Resequencing of the fragment citations in the following manner: fragments 8, 10, then 14-15 as one, then 11, 9, then fragment 12.1-3, then fragment 13 [as 12.X], then again 12.4-6, and lastly fragment 17 [as the last line of 12.Y], would have helped this transition in being more reflective of the greatness of Parmenides' power of cosmogonic storytelling.

In a similar vein, Calenda's chapter 4 "La dea della vita" (The goddess of life), would have been best situated following chapter 2, "Le due forme" (The two forms) seeing how in both chapters Calenda is preparing his terms, and references. This would have freed up and linked his more illuminating chapters on "La sfericità della terra" with "Struttura della terra", and take us into a Verne-like journey to the center of the earth, and to his arguments for the possibility that fragment 12 refers not to celestial entities, but to the very composition, and zones, of the earth. This is defended, quite boldly, in chapter 5, section 3, "Descrizione della sfera terrestre" (p. 75-80), yet it is tempered, and thrown out of orbit, when Calenda admits to the "residual uncertainties" when speaking of a description of a Parmenidean universe (p. 99), due to the lack of direct information, the silence of sources, and indirect circumstances (p. 100). With this in mind, the conjectures about a cosmological order leave us only with Calenda's strongly held conviction of the earth's geological composition, and thereupon the place of the δαίμων (Gaia?) who steers all in fragment 12.3. These conjectures do nothing to show, or defend, how there is an open, or reopened, universe based on his particular rereading of Parmenides' poem. The structure of the earth is clear enough, while the general cosmology still suffers, artificially torn between pitting Aëtius' easy equation of κόσμος-έόν, against Hippolytus' rendition of fragments 10 and 11 as purely destructive forces of the physical cosmos.

In all, Calenda merits praise for his focus on fragment 12, peppered by illustrative footnotes that build interest and inroads towards the more scientific aspects of Parmenides' poem (p. 10, n. 2; p. 12, n. 5; p. 49, n. 5; p. 65, n. 79). One wishes that these illustrative notes had subsections of their own. Gathering the mentions of fragment 12 in his text, with an eye to "Table 1" (p. 66-67), a side-by-side view of Aëtius, and Parmenides, that is developed in detail in chapters 5, "Struttura della Terra" and 6 "Cosmologia", leads us to "Figura 1" (p. 98). Here we find Calenda's real contribution, along with his vision of the cosmos of Parmenides. While the bibliography and generous footnotes display plenty of supporting sources (pro and con), I find that due to the growth, and historically entangled overgrowth in Parmenidean studies, a few helpful sources are missing, to mention only a few. There is, while cited, no actual critical use of J. S. Morrison's "Parmenides and Er" (Morrison, 1955), where we also find an interpretation and graphic rendition of Parmenides' *stephanai*. A very pertinent work by Christopher J. Kurfess (2012) is missing, and would have helped clarify, and critique Calenda's reliance on Cordero's view on the *doxai*, as well as provide detailed issue with doxographical sources. There is no mention or use of Popper, or Feyerabend's poignant studies on Parmenides, or Verdenius' "Parmenides' Conception of Light" (Verdenius, 1949). Missing also is Franco Ferrari's enlightening *Il Migliore dei Mondi Impossibile: Parmenide e il Cosmo dei Presocratici* (Ferrari, 2010), as well as Giorgio Colli's seminal lessons on Parmenides (Colli, 2003). Here is either the curse or blessing of the proliferation, and layers of sedimentation that make up Parmenidean studies. The "Biblioteca Parmenidea 1961-2016" of Massimo Pulpito, is actually manageable, and available in: <http://www.fondazionealario.it/neweleatica/biblioteca-parmenidea/>. Yet, together with the vast collection of critical editions, multilingual translations, and A to Z annotated bibliography on Parmenides, available in: <http://www.ontology.co/biblio/parmenides>, one is faced with more than enough to be inspired, humbled, or discouraged, but mostly to seek restraint from finding an all too easy way through the thickets and battlefields of Parmenidean studies. Calenda has

valiantly tried. Alluring, entangled, and difficult as they have grown, the presence of Guido Calenda's *Un Universo Aperto*, will add another signpost to an opening for future study, in caution, courage, and dedication to Parmenidean studies.

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Submitted in 19/08/2018 and accepted for publication 25/08/2018



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